DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 174 SO 035 066

AUTHOR	Kremer, Mary
TITLE	Religious Education for the Disenfranchised: Fusing Multicultural Strategies into Catholic High School Religion Classes.
PUB DATE	2003-04-00
NOTE	16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (84th, Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Catholic Schools; Classroom Research; Futures (of Society); Hermeneutics; High Schools; *Multicultural Education; Naturalistic Observation; Phenomenology; *Religious Education; Secondary Education; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	Twenty First Century

ABSTRACT

Although multicultural education is misunderstood by many and feared by some, it has been embraced by educators throughout the world as a necessary approach to preparing the next generation for the complexities of the 21st century. A study explored the work of three Catholic secondary religion teachers, who use multicultural strategies in their classrooms. Data come from classroom observations in metropolitan schools in the United States, interviews, and personal reflections using Max Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. The study concludes that when teachers understand and embrace multicultural principles student benefits increase, particularly in terms of self efficacy and a desire to participate in creating a more just society. It is estimated that by 2020 half of the students in schools will be nonwhite schools. Education must respond to students of color as a matter of justice and for the sake of maintaining a strong workforce into the next century. (Contains 20 references.) (Author/BT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Religious Education for the Disenfranchised: Fusing Multicultural Strategies into Catholic High School Religion Classes

Mary Kremer
Dominican University

ED 479 174

ABSTRACT

Although multicultural education is misunderstood by many and feared by some, it has been embraced by educators throughout the world as a necessary approach to preparing the next generation for the complexities of the 21st Century. This study describes the work of three Catholic secondary religion teachers who inform their classes with multicultural strategies. Data comes from classroom observations in metropolitan schools in the United States, interviews, and personal reflection using Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. This study concluded that when teachers understand and embrace multicultural principles student benefits increase, especially in terms of self-efficacy and a desire to participate in creating a more just society.

Introduction

Born of the Civil Rights Movement, multicultural education has been with us for only30 years, but for many in Catholic religious education it remains elusive. Religious educators, aware of the Catholic Church's disdain for John Dewey because of his professed atheism, never accepted his progressive educational theories. In the decades that followed, secular educational theories were eschewed for fear that they would contaminate Catholic religious education. More recently, liberation theology, which has given oppressed peoples throughout the world a new hope and reason to continue the struggle for self-determination, has been condemned by the Catholic Church (Ratzinger, 1984) as being atheist and communist inspired. At present the Office of the Catechism exercises control over textbooks used in religious education classroom (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002). In effect, this oversight determines much of the curriculum.

Public school education is benefiting from insights of the multiculturalists; its goals, principles, and instructional strategies are transforming the way we carry out the task of educating the next generation. While public school curriculum and classrooms are being transformed through multicultural education, Catholic religious educators continue to rely on traditional didactic methodologies inherited from previous generations to pass on the tenets of the faith. Multicultural education is not about ethnic foods and clothing or one-day celebrations. It is an approach that moves the focus from teacher to students; it begins with student experiences and promotes multiple perspectives. It seeks transformation through reflection, leading to new insights and social change. In a word, it is a new paradigm. It is a new lens through which to view, interpret, and act in life. Inherently, therefore it cannot conform to previous paradigms.

Theoretical Framework

Multicultural education carries as many meanings as there are definers of the term. Grant and Sleeter (1999) group approaches into the following five general categories: (a) teaching the exceptional and culturally different, (b) human relations, (c) single group studies, (d) multicultural education approach, (e) social reconstruction. A second generation of theorists has

SO 035 066

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. E. Kremer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent

given multicultural education a stronger socio-political orientation, described by Ladson-Billings (1992)

> Culturally relevant pedagogy prepares students to effect change in society, not merely fit into it. These teachers support this attitude of change by capitalizing on their students' home and community culture. These teachers . . . . empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes . . . . to urge collective action grounded in cultural understanding, experience, and ways of knowing the world." (pp. 382-383)

Within this socio-political framework, specific classroom strategies emerge as being particularly appropriate for religious education. One, the formation of a caring community provides a social context in which students comfortably pursue the tasks of religious education (Pang, 2001). Within this community, students begin with their own experiences, beliefs, and values. A second strategy for faith development is direct engagement with the scriptures of that particular tradition (Groome, 1991). A third strategy, social analysis, enables students to understand the social reality in which they must function (Neito, 1999). Lastly, students learn and practice social action strategies to enable them to experience their own ability to bring about change in a social setting (Bennett, 2003).

As we begin the 21st Century prognosticators tell us that the world will be vastly different from what we have known. Among educators, the discussion focuses on the real world needs of today's students. Their world will require persons who are capable of constructing knowledge based on their own diverse experiences. It will ask that persons respond creatively to contradictions, multiple voices, and enormous problems. It will require that students learn how to be both reflective and critical of the world they inhabit. For students of color and those from low socioeconomic classes, the challenge of confronting or coping in the white, dominant culture will be even greater. While Wink (1997) suggests that critical pedagogy serves to fulfill this agenda for regular classroom teachers. I suggest that multicultural education principles will provide the same framework and instructional strategies for religion teachers in Catholic schools.

Purpose of Research

Efforts have been made by notable Catholic writers to promote a multicultural approach to Catholic religious education (Groome, 1991; Herrera, 1992; Talvacchio (1997). I wanted to see multiculturalism operative in actual classrooms; I wanted to study these teachers, their work, and the effects of multicultural education on their students. Among 49 schools surveyed for participation in this research, I found three teachers in Catholic high school religion classes who espoused and implemented multicultural education. Pat taught "Introduction to Scripture and Sexuality" among freshman women; Sr. Bernice taught "Issues in Justice" to junior level women, and Mike taught "Church in the Americas" to senior level women. My guiding question throughout the research was what is the essence of multicultural education as it is practiced in each of these classrooms and what meaning does this experience hold for the teachers and students in these classrooms?

To pursue this question I needed a method that asked me to probe for, and eventually distill, the essential meanings I derived from my experiences in four separate classrooms over the course of one academic year. And finally, I needed a methodology whereby I could bring to thoughtful expression my experience of each of these teachers. Thus, van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology (1990) seemed most suitable to my needs.

This article intends to describe their beliefs and practices in order to give others a clearer view of the potential of multicultural education for addressing the needs of 21st Century students, especially students of color and those from low SES backgrounds, in Catholic religious education settings. While all three teachers' classrooms exhibited each of the strategies in varying degrees, for purposes of illustration, I will focus on one strategy, except social action, in each of the classrooms.

Classroom Strategies for Religious Education

Creation of Caring Communities.

Rogers and Freiberg (1994) describe the ethic of care as a necessary framework for humanist schools. They advocate a conscientious development of strong caring relationships among and between teachers and students. They identified specific elements in teachers: empathy, positive school climate, and trusting relationships. They believed these characteristics foster learning communities where students developed high self-esteem, confidence, and commitment to personal growth. Noddings (1992) believes that human caring is at the heart of human education. She writes, "We should educate all our children not only for competence but also for caring. Our aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people (p. xiv). In Noddings' school, compassion, respect, and community building are both the curriculum and methodology. For Pang (2001), caring learning communities are the only viable context in which to respect the cultural diversity of our students while they develop the necessary skills to participate in a democratic society pledged to create a better world.

Sr. Bernice's Caring Classroom

Every day, just before lunch, 28 young women walk through the doors of the classroom for 45 minutes of junior level "Peace and Justice." I do not see the exuberance and carefree behavior usually found among groups of high school students, but rather the pained and silent faces of young women who have experienced too much of life's strife and difficulty too soon. These young women come to Sr. Bernice's religion class seeking respite from the burdens of home, the streets, and their job sites. They are primarily Hispanic and African Americans, who live in urban neighborhoods not too far from the school. In this accepting environment they tell stories about their lives away from St. Dorothy High School. Their stories reveal the plight of young women trying to make sense of a fractured world in which they are often the wounded. One of the students talked about her lost confidence in her mother who "dates like a teenager" and "makes me take care of the house." Another student said that she feels left out of the family circle of concern at home "because everything focuses on my brother who is in prison." Another student came to class one day looking for advice from her teacher and classmates for a friend who had been raped at work. In the steady flow of stories shared throughout the semester I recall very few that were without pain, oppression, and struggle.

Sr. Bernice responds to their pain and struggle by welcoming them into a "holy place." "In this room the hand of God helps us to join hands." She believes her role in the classroom is that of "facilitator of cooperating and caring," creating an atmosphere in which her students feel free to be themselves. She believes that it is equally important for her to reach out to the "outcasts" in her class: the "thumb-sucker," the gang member, the "girl that smells." She envisions her class as a community of young women who care about one another and who feel "free to talk about their beliefs, their dreams and their hopes." Sr. Bernice believes that it is important for her students to be able to talk freely, woman to woman, about their concerns and unanswered questions. She knows that for some students her class might be the only opportunity to discuss their problems openly.

She is clear about what she wants her classroom to be. She says, "I like to have openness of mind and heart in my class." True to her desire, she frequently begins class with a request to her students. "Today I want to ask all of you to open your hearts, open your ears, open your mind for what you might see, hear and understand." In her classroom she creates a climate of openness by being a real human being. Unlike some teachers who hide behind podiums and textbooks, Sr. Bernice is not afraid to share her feelings with the students. In talking about hunger, she told them about her own continual struggle with food and weight gain. Nor is she afraid to let the students know that she too needs affirmation and support from others. In sharing herself, she offers the students a model for classroom discussion, thus, inviting them to respond in kind.

"I teach a lot through prayer," she says. Her favorite moments in the classroom are "the quiet, peaceful moments when I feel that the Lord has joined us together. I like the prayer rituals." Prayer time in Sr. Bernice's room begins class each day. It is a quiet time; conversations stop and all eyes turn toward the teacher. For these few minutes she occupies center stage by herself. It is the opportune moment for her to articulate, without questions or comments, some of her own deepest beliefs. It is a holy time, she believes, when God is very present in her classroom. Perhaps it is the time when the students are most attentive. The students were even more engaged for the Friday Circle of Prayer. Each week, a group of students prepared a prayer ritual that lasted the entire period. They chose their own themes and carried out the ritual, usually long on music, readings, and poetry and short on commentary. What is important for Sr. Bernice is that "the prayer is theirs."

A third approach Sr. Bernice has adopted is to learn from her students. "Every day I am learning more. I don't live in the world of my students. When they tell me stories of their experiences I am learning from them, how they cope and overcome, how they free themselves, and how they free others. They teach me through prayer when they mention things that have happened in their lives: friends being killed, gang members who are their friends, parents being beaten, them being beaten."

Lastly, while Sr. Bernice focuses on facilitating a circle of care within her classroom, she also uses the idea of concentric circles to take her students from an inner circle of care and concern about their own issues to the larger circle of social justice among the human family. On the topic of Third World Hunger, she began with a simple question, "Have you every been hungry, really hungry?" With further questioning, she walked them cognitively from the local and familiar to the global and new knowledge. I witnessed this widening circles approach many times in Sr. Bernice's classroom. She carried it out effortlessly, as if to say, all of life is one.

At the end of the semester I interviewed four students from this class. Judy liked the prayer rituals because "it brought us closer together; it made us friends." Clara liked Sr. Bernice's gentle approach: "If we don't feel comfortable with a questions, she doesn't make us answer it." Charlene said that she was learning to become nonjudgmental. She gave a personal example to illustrate:

> We were talking about who can you trust out on the street. If somebody is asking me for money, I used to not care about them, and I just kept walking. Now, the other day, there was a pregnant girl. I stopped and talked to her. I wanted to be sure the she had some place to go.

Sonia recognized a change in her attitude toward people who are different form herself.

> I see other people as equal to me. I don't look down on other people, or put myself on a pedestal. I didn't [think like this] before this class. I used to think

> that all black people were on welfare. They [were] bad. They have too many kids. Now I see them as my friends. I stereotyped black people and other groups. Now I see how wrong that is.

She told me that she now sees the world differently because of Sr. Bernice's class: " I want to go out and help the world. I want to be like superwoman."

Direct Engagement with the Scriptures

My formal religious education as a girl attending a Catholic elementary school was a singular diet of *The Baltimore Catechism*. From first through eighth grade, the protocol was the same: memorizing the answers to the 150 questions that would provide all the answers that I would need to know about my religion and its practices. What I did not realize during those formative years is that I was never invited to question anything because the answers were already provided. In high school, we had textbooks, none of which I can even remember. At home, we did have a leather bound family bible, which occupied a space on the shelf, from which it was lifted only to record events of religious passage. It was not until college, in a Western Civilization course taught through the History Department, that I first read about the First Century Christians as citizens of the Roman Empire in *Acts of the Apostles*. That reading experience was the only memorable departure from the text. It was significant for me because I felt I was reading the real story.

Textbook publishers incorporate very few primary sources in their textbooks. In an effort to sell as many textbooks as possible to a variety of audiences, have neutralized their texts. Serious efforts have been made, starting in the 1970s, to address the issue of textbook bias. In religious education it is taken for granted that texts will promote the doctrine and right practice of that particular faith expression. Prior to Vatican Council II, 1962-1965, Catholic scriptures were to be read and interpreted only by professional experts. Even today, mainstream Catholics mistrust their ability to interpret and apply scripture to their own lives. Thus, Catholics, unlike Protestant Christians, historically have had little understanding of the power of their scriptures. The equally powerful mantra: "Read the word and read the world" (Friere and Macedo, 1987) introduces yet another dynamic dimension to the power of the word when it is read in relation to one's personal experiences. If primary sources provide students of history with clearer insights about a very complex world, I believe primary sources can do the same for religious educators. The primary source for Catholic religious educators is the Catholic bible.

Pat Engages Students in Scripture Study

During the many months I spent in Pat's class, I never saw a textbook, but every day I saw a Catholic bible, placed prominently in the front of the room, and copies on almost every student's desk. The scriptures were the text in Pat's classroom of 9th grade female students. She uses a dramatic presentation style frequently with the students. By presenting the scriptures in a language and in situations familiar to them, she strives to engage their imaginations and to make these age-old stories applicable to their lives. One day she began a discussion of *Amos 4* with the students.

"In the city of Samaria there are some wealthy people and some very wealthy women. Very wealthy women who can lie on their couches all day, eating bonbons, or they stay home and watch the soaps, right? Wouldn't you like to do that? Wouldn't you really like a day off? Every day as a day off? And lie there and say, 'Hey, Mom, bring me nachos.'" In this manner Pat introduces the students to the prophet Amos.

"I would, "says Missy.

"I wouldn't like <u>every</u> [underlining added] day off," Ruth offers.

Tiffany joins in. "I'd rather go shopping."

"I'd rather watch TV," adds Rosy.

The students watch and listen as Pat moves into scripture. The text reads: "Hear this word, women of the mountain of Samaria, you cows of Bashan, You who oppress the weak and abuse the needy; Who say to your lords, 'Bring drink for us.'" (Amos 4:1) She continues, "Now Amos has a word for the women in Samaria who lie there on their couches." As though the words themselves are not enough to quicken a student's imagination, Pat wants to make sure that the students understand the full impact of the imagery. "Look at that. 'Hear this, women of the mountain of Samaria. You cows of Bashan.' If you were one of those women, how would you feel about Amos calling you a cow?"

"I'd feel terrible," Myra responds.

"Awful," adds Dorothy.

"Embarrassed," says Tina.

Pat asks another question to enlarge the circle of discussants: "If you were women laying on your couches, saying to your husband: 'Get this for me; get that for me.' do you think your husband would do that for you?"

"Maybe," Bridget answers confidently, looking to see how others will respond.

"Maybe not," several students chorus sheepishly.

Pat gets to the heart of Amos' message. She continues with a monologue, asking and answering her own rhetorical questions. "Do you think Amos was angry with these women because they were wealthy? (Pause) No. Why is Amos angry with these women? (Pause) Amos is not angry with them because they have something. He is angry because of the way in which they got their money. They got rich by taking from the poor. And he is not afraid to say so." She comes to the end of the Amos text. She pauses.

"Why does he go around criticizing people?" Marilyn asks.

Pat responds by asking yet another question: "That's a good question. Why does he do that?"

"Because that is his role," Kate speaks out knowingly.

Taking her cue from Kate, Pat explains, "People who accumulate their wealth at the expense of the poor deserve the anger of the prophets. Amos finally had enough, and he says things exactly as they are. Not all prophets are like this. This is Amos' style."

There is another pause until one student says, "I like him." Pat says simply, "Yes, I like him too." The bell brings the discussion to a close, leaving the students to their own thoughts about Amos.

Actual instruction, for Pat, means that the students "engage in the scriptures." She believes that the primary source material for Christians is scripture. Her methodology is a dialectic process, similar in part to Groome's *dialectical hermeneutics* (1991), in which the students move between their own story and the story of their ancestors in faith. In this process she invites the students to imagine themselves within the context of the biblical story, as though they were actually within the original event. Through questioning, she helps them analyze what is happening and how the characters in the original story must have thought and felt: What is God saying? Why did God say that? What meaning did it have for those people?

When she is satisfied that they have sufficiently entered the dialogue and understood the event from the inside, she turns the focus to their own stories. In the context of the classroom community, they share their own stories. For example, in studying the healing stories, she asked them to write about and share with others their own stories of healing. They share not only the

events of the drama, but their feelings and interpretations of what happened. Back and forth, back and forth, she guides them, between the stories of the bible and their stories, between scripture and lived experience.

> I need to engage the students in scripture, even though they have heard it before. We need to take a look at it again, given their experiences since the last time they read them. We have to ask: "What does this say to us? How am I poor? Oppressed?" The freshmen, because they are little kids, it's important for me to keep reminding them that they need to reflect on themselves. . . . It's hard for them to deal with "clothe the naked, feed the hungry." They want to go back to the Ten Commandments because that is where it is safe. I know it is important to teach the scriptures and to nudge them into saying: "What do the scriptures mean to me? What does it mean today when I walk out into the street?"

Her questions range from simple, direct questions, like "What does the word exit mean?" to questions which elicit a more personal response: "Have you ever felt like a slave?" Particularly those questions about students' personal experiences she asks thoughtfully, respectfully: "Have you ever had a desert experience?"

Mrs. Lacey's desire to "engage the students in scripture" was effective with the students I interviewed. Rochelle spoke to the helpfulness of the reflective questioning. "She gives us meditating questions and wants to know who you are as a person, where you stand spiritually and religiously." Her effort to relate the scripture stories to the personal lives of the students was caught by Missy who said: "She makes you think a lot more, go deeper. She'll be talking about a topic and relate it to something that happens in everyday life, so you can understand the topic more and say, 'Oh, she's right.' She relates it to things that happen to us." Kate appreciated Mrs. Lacey's approach to the scriptures. "She taught us how to get into the scriptures and how to read it . . . The whole thing about the outcasts. She taught us that stories have meaning according to the way those people saw things in their time."

From the student comments it was clear to me that the class had affected their perceptions of themselves, of others, and of life in general. According to the students, the class had the greatest influence in changing the way they viewed themselves. Three of the students described a change in their self-concept. Kate credited the class with helping her to see herself more clearly.

> I see myself better. The discussions bring out my opinions and I can see how I think. I view myself better because I know how my ideas come out, how I work with others on projects. [When we did the] skits, we had to create a problem and then solve it and put an action to it. Then reflect on it.

Missy also spoke of the positive effect Mrs. Lacey had on her self-image.

> After being in [her] class, she makes you think about things you haven't thought about. I try to be a better person, because she knows who you are and how you think. She makes me look at myself and try to get along with others better.

Social Analysis

In the 1960s the Catholic bishops of the Vatican II meeting, eager to open the Church to the world and invite the world into the Church, called Catholics to "scrutinizing [sic] the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel" (*Church in the Modern World, #4).* Freire, a director of literacy in Latin America, provided educators with the *praxis* model based on a continual movement back and forth between reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (1970). Groomed (1991) developed a model for catechesis, called *shared praxis*, borrowed from Freire, suggests critical reflection on one's experience in relation to the tradition

and teachings of the Catholic Church. Alachua (1997) moved the discussion forward by stating that social analysis is necessary if religious education is to be faithful to the prophetic Christian imperative to promote just relationships in society. Social analysis in a religious context invites learners to become aware of their particular place in society, to look at it critically, asking such questions as: Who has the power and who does not? Who decides? Who benefits and who loses? In a religious education context, what do our scriptures and religious traditions have to say about situations like this? And finally, how might things be different and what action can we take to change the situation? (Center for Media Literacy, 2003).

Mike's Critical Reflection Process

"You've been lied to. You've been oppressed because you've been told things that are absolute lies. You've been asked to accept those lies and live with those lies, and then judge people based on those lies." This is one of the scathing messages Mike Longo, a teacher of religion at Hope High School, presents to the students in his senior honors class each year. "You've been lied to," is not a condemnation of the young women who share the "Church in the Americas" class with him, but a judgment against the nation in which he lives and teaches. As a teacher of religion, Mike feels compelled to share his truth with students. The truth that he presents is a particular worldview he has developed through years of studying theology and history, music and literature. His personal search to find meaning for his own life has contributed to this uncommon perspective. Mike believes that every human being moves through life in search of meaning, making choices in an effort at self-definition, "Everyone has a theology--whatever moves you through life--because that defines who you are." Mike finds his preferred meaning of life in the Christian paradigm. He is as radical as the religious prophet he has chosen to follow. "Somewhere along the line I made a conscious choice to buy into the historical Christ."

Mike takes his own spirituality seriously and he wants the same for his students. He sees them as "caring and compassionate" young women. He wants them to get beyond "oatmeal [watered-down] Christianity." He wants them "to walk out of class feeling good about themselves and redeemed, the child of God idea, and that they can make a difference." He says, "The transformation and the justice in society and everything else will come, because you have people who feel good about who they are and feel redeemed, and [they] will want to bring redemption to the rest of society." His goals for the students are the following:

1. Respect for oneself and one's cultural identity.
2. An understanding of the possibilities for cultural enhancement through meshing with other cultures.
3. An understanding that the gospel has the potential to unite all cultures.
4. The ability to articulate reasons why the economic and political systems of this country are basically evil.

To work toward these goals in the course of one semester, Mike uses a methodology he entitles calls critical reflection. During the first week of the semester he presented the model to the students that would drive the course throughout the semester. He wrote the process on the chalkboard where it remained for the better part of a week.

Critical Reflection Process

1. Remember the past: (understand one's self).
2. Act in the present: (individuals and community).
3. Transform the future: (the will to love).

Several weeks later he again wrote on the board, rephrasing the basic outline.

1. To be aware is to understand.
2. One sees differently from a "down" perspective.
3. Because of what one sees, one is moved to take action; this action is termed transformation.

This time, to check the students' grasp of the process, he asked them to provide examples to accompanying each of the steps. In a matter of minutes they retraced the narrative. The story, in brief, was about a local college graduate, "Dana," who had volunteered to work in a health clinic in Haiti. Because of what she experienced living and working among the people, she began to understand life from the perspective of the poor. This in turn led her to question the motives and actions of the U.S. government in that country. She wrote the article to share her new understandings with students at her alma mater.

In an effort to help his students become more like Dana, Mike leads the students through the process with a series of questions, which he articulated for me during our interview.

1. What are your experiences? And then, how does your story relate to the larger human story, particularly [to] those that are suffering in a variety of ways?
2. Do you see yourself as being oppressed in different ways?
3. Can you connect that in some way to the oppression of others?
4. Where does the gospel speak to that?
5. How can it be transforming?
6. Then it means that you and I have to put it into action so that it transforms our lives.

The content for the "Church in the Americas" course focuses on three groups of indigenous peoples of North and South America—their histories, their cultures and religious beliefs—who suffered at the hands of the invading Europeans. He presents the stories of the Guarani Indians of Paraguay, descendants of the Africans brought to this country as salves, and the Plains Indians of North America. He uses film to tell their stories: *Mission, Eyes on the Prize,* and *Dances with Wolves.*

> If we are going to start with the 1600s in the middle of South American and end up with native American Indians" [downtown], films are an immediate experience for these students. In the films I use, a story carries the message, and we only have 16 weeks. We have to come out of a story, because they are not going to remember concepts. The message is so, so different from what they are hearing [elsewhere] because then they have to fill in the blanks and say, "Well, how come?"

Of special interest to my research is the question of change within the students brought about by the class. I asked each of the students about noticeable changes in their attitudes toward self, people of other cultures, and United States culture.

Each of the students spoke about Mr. Longo's class as an experience of self-insight and empowerment. Ann said that the class had given her the ability to respond to global issues with greater confidence.

> I used to feel overwhelmed by the problems of the world, but this class has given me an opportunity to see that while I can't do everything, at least I can do something. Right? A little at a time. And if everyone does a little at a time, it will make a difference.

Katie felt, nearing the end of the course, that she now knew "that if I want the world to change, I have to take responsibility to make those changes." Tina's comments highlighted the urgency for taking responsibility: "It's not what the city can do [for people]; it's what you can do to help others? That has to come first."

Mr. Longo's efforts to help the students deepen their understanding of the universality of the human experience were not wasted on these students. Katie recalled the initial assignment Mr. Longo gave them at the beginning of the term.

> What really sticks out in my mind [about this class] is that in order to understand other people, we have to understand our own history. In the beginning of the year we had to find out how our family migrated to this country. When I talked with my grandmother, she told me that when my great-great grandparents came to this country, they went through a very hard time. It helped me understand.

Tina's insight reveals motivation to reach across cultural boundaries to help others, especially those who are poor.

> Mr. Longo helped me to see that even though people of other cultures speak a different language, we have the same feelings, [the] same concerns and interests. People really are the same: we want to care, to be friends. Mr. Longo has really helped me to think about others, especially poor people. They are just like us but they lack the advantages we have, so we want to help them.

I asked the students directly: "What do you think about his assertion that the economic and political systems of this country are evil? Ann spoke of a growing awareness for the need to look more critically at events, people, and their stories. "The whole way the system actually works. It's phoney. We only get one story, and the rest of the stories are left out. Now when I see stories, I ask myself, 'Is that the true story? Or, it there something else behind it?'"

Some of Mr. Longo's indictment came through clearly in Mary's emotional response. "I am more aware of how our government will tell us one thing and do another. Iraq. They said they we were going there to help, but really they were after the oil fields. It made me feel angry that they are lying to us." But, like Ann, she also grasped more clearly Mr. Longo's larger message. "He means that we have to continually ask questions."

Social Action

Social action skills are a natural outgrowth of critical reflection. At the point in time when students become aware of a problem, it is appropriate for teachers to help the students respond through some action, however small, rather than allow them to flounder in an unanswered question, or worse, in a helpless feeling in face of the dilemma. For the learner in Christian religious education, the mandate to reach out in compassion and caring action also carries a moral responsibility. For Bennett (2003), social action skills are one of six goals of multicultural education. These skills include "the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to help resolve major problems that threaten the future of the planet and the well-being of humanity" (p. 34). To not include social action as a major goal of multicultural education makes multicultural education meaningless (p 404). Nieto's (2000) model of multicultural education includes "decision-making and social actions skills as the basis of the curriculum" (p.343). While both authors acknowledge that social action is most properly carried out by the hands of adults, learners, even the youngest can be taught to take action on behalf of others in their immediate environment. Wink (2000) says that the "problem-posing" approach (Freire, 1970) is straightforward enough for the youngest children. It is a three-step process: to name, to reflect critically, and to act.

For each of the three teachers I observed, social action was an integral part of the curriculum. Pat's first-year students are expected to complete 10 hours of community service as part of the course requirement. Sr. Bernice invites students to contribute monthly to various charities and causes and to participate in projects she organizes to benefit the poor. Mike's students not only participate in regular benefits for others, but as seniors in high school, they take on responsibilities for organizing these special events.

Christian service is an important component of Pat's curriculum. All students in 9th grade are expected to complete 10 hours of Christian service as part of their religion class requirement. They do this in a variety of situations, mostly at established social service or educational sites. The students visit the housebound in their neighborhoods, work in homes for senior citizens, tutor students needing assistance with their school work, and serve in soup kitchens.

On one of my visits to her classroom, they were studying the story of the Last Supper. Pat chose to use the text from the Lucan gospel, also called the Gospel of the Poor, to highlight the connection between worship and service. After reading the text with the students, she explained to them that, at one and the same time, Jesus gave his disciples the gift of the Eucharist and the mandate to serve others, both as requirements for membership in the Kingdom of God. She explained to the students.

> Service projects are not given to you because we think that you have nothing else to do. The mission of the school is to prepare you to love, do justice and be merciful in society. We show that not only by receiving the bread, but also by doing something that is also a Jesus action. That's service. It comes right out of the gospel. These two are interconnected. You can't be Christian and not do service.

Sr. Bernice engages her students in social action locally and globally. On the local level, she has become identified with "solving problems" at St. Dorothy's. The students, this semester alone, have gone to her about administrative policies they consider to be unfair: prohibiting the use of book bags in school, failure to restore lockers that have broken locks, a decision not to celebrate Black History month. Rather than advocate before the administration on behalf of the students, she teaches them how to gather a group together, to write a letter, to ask for an interview, to address the problem together. She is also a resource for persons and groups outside of the school who are in need of funds. Regularly students take up collections to benefit families in the school who are in need, homeless shelters, missionaries in Third World countries.

One specific action deserves special mention. For the second time, this coming summer, Sr. Bernice will take a group of students fro n St. Dorothy's to Jonesboro, Kentucky for two weeks where they will share their talents and time with children and families of Appalachia. Although she is the sole resource for planning this summer service project, she credits one of her students with initiating the idea. Last year, one of her religious Sisters came from Appalachia to talk about "Poverty in the South." While the Sister's brochure about Appalachia and the need for summertime volunteers lay on the teacher's desk unread, one of Sr. Bernice's students said, "We'd like to go. Will you take us?" That was the genesis of the summer service project.

Mike contends that social action must be an integral part of his course for two reasons: The integrity of the discipline [religion] requires that students be given ample opportunities to care for others. Or, as he states it, "Every world religion has at its core the care for the community." He also believes that action projects give caring and compassionate students a chance to respond to topics discussed in class. Mike offers the students many opportunities for

action throughout the semester. During the one semester I attended his class, I noted the Crop Walk in October, the Oxfam Banquet in November, and the Cross Cultural Crafts sale in December. Mike is the major sponsor/coordinator at Hope for these events. In addition, he also invited students to purchase coffee directly from a Central American cooperative and Christmas cards from UNICEF.

In mid-October all the Hope students are invited to participate in the national Crop Walk for Hunger. Mike's message is a message of hope, based on the Christian belief in the resurrection. He believes that through the efforts of informed and committed people the injustices of this world will be overcome; eventually the Kingdom of God will prevail. In the films he shows and the people he talks about, he always finds a way to highlight the chapter after the tragedy. According to Mike, the necessary means to that hopeful last chapter is action that leads to transformation. While participation is not mandatory, his appeal suggests that students have a moral responsibility to participate. In promoting the Crop Walk for Hunger, I heard him say.

> We want to support people throughout the world who want to have water so they can grow their own crops, so that they do not have to live lives as slaves to the wealthy plantation owners and the elite of the multinational corporations. That's what the Crop Walk supports. So unless you are getting married or buried, I want you to be in the Crop Walk. And I want you to tell other students who might be reluctant to participate that this is a life-death situation.

To experience one of these actions, I spent a short time at a local Presbyterian church with Mike and the students before the Walk began. I interviewed a few of the students, not surprised by their comments, who said things like, "I'm walking because of Mr. Longo. He's had a real influence on my life." Another young woman said that Mr. Longo's class had convinced her that she could do something to make a difference in the lives of people who are poor and hungry. A third student said that she was "walking for the poor, trying to help other countries out." Mike acknowledges that the Crop Walk is his favorite action. He likes the fact that the students are hearing his message through other channels.

Student responses to the social action agenda of their teachers varied from simple to sophisticated. From Pat's class, Kate reported seeing the connection between the message of scripture and her life.

> I appreciate life more [because I] understand the scriptures and Jesus more. We talk about outcasts--lower people in society--like homeless people, those who are not included for what they look like or [those who] have a disability. And now I see people who are outcasts. Because of my [community] service [project at a home for senior citizens] I see how older people don't get much attention because they are old. And how Jesus helped so many people. I see now that I have so much more than other people.

Sonia says that seeing the world through the new lens that Sr. Bernice has shared with the students has given her a desire and determination to engage in social action on her own.

> I want to go out and help the world. I want to be like superwoman. I want to help the poor people, the children. I want to do something to change everything in this world. I want to try to open a shelter or something. The homeless people. Don't make them think that they are throwaways because they have no money. Get them on their feet; give them a job.

Each of the students in Mike's class spoke about an experience of self-insight and empowerment. Ann said that the class had given her the ability to respond to global issues with greater confidence.

> I used to feel overwhelmed by the problems of the world, but this class has given me an opportunity to see that while I can't do everything, at least I can do something. Right? A little at a time. And if everyone does a little at a time, it will make a difference.

Katie felt, nearing the end of the course, that she now knew "that if I want the world to change, I have to take responsibility to make those changes." Tina's comments highlighted the urgency for taking responsibility: "It's not what the city can do [for people]; it's what you can do to help others? That has to come first."

Tina's insight reveals motivation to reach across cultural boundaries to help others, especially those who are poor.

> Mr. Longo helped me to see that even though people of other cultures speak a different language, we have the same feelings, [the] same concerns and interests. People really are the same: we want to care, to be friends. Mr. Longo has really helped me to think about others, especially poor people. They are just like us but they lack the advantages we have, so we want to help them.

Further Discussion

I have reported research done in three classrooms of secondary teachers of religion in Catholic schools. Regretfully, they represent the efforts of only a few, but it is a beginning. The purpose of this article therefore is to participate in the conversation about possibilities for Catholic religious education that will address the needs of the growing numbers of students of color and those from low SES backgrounds who increasingly populate our schools.

Demographics in society and within the Catholic Church are changing. The population of nonwhites in the United States is growing annually through immigration and high birth rates among people of color. The classrooms of the nation's schools are populated more and more by students of color. At present about a third of students enrolled in public school, K-12, are students of color. It is estimated that by 2020, half of the students will be nonwhites. The need to provide quality education for these students is what Banks (1994, p. 32) calls the *demographic imperative*. He argues that schools must respond to students of color as a matter of justice and for the sake of maintaining a strong workforce into the next century.

The racial and economic complexion of students in Catholic schools is changing as well. Particularly in urban areas, the numbers of students of color in Catholic schools is growing. While Catholic school minority population lags behind, present statistics show that about a quarter of students in Catholic schools are minorities (NCEA). I know some teachers, especially in urban Catholic schools who want a curriculum that moves beyond the violence, poverty, racism, and futility customarily associated with minority urban life. They want a philosophy and methodology that speaks a message of hope by valuing the experience and knowledge of these students. They want courses and programs that enable students to overcome the alienation of urban life while promoting a shared commitment to the creation of a just world for themselves and others. I believe that the incorporation of multicultural education, its principles and practices, in Catholic religious education curricula would provide students of color with a spirituality that would enable them to cope in a society that does not bless their socioeconomic status.

But multicultural education is not only a consolation and a coping strategy for the poor. It is for the middle-class and wealthy who also populate Catholic schools. If one professes to live, or teach, a gospel spirituality that includes concern for the "widows, orphans, outcasts, and aliens," one ought to feel compelled to relieve the sufferings of the millions of poor and suffering both within the United States and throughout the entire human family. This relief is insufficient if it is doled out to the poor in meager allotments out of a sense of pity. From a perspective of justice and respect for all human beings, students in Catholic religious education ought to be asked to go beyond mere charitable giving to critique the causes of poverty and alienation. This social analysis leads one to conclude that only a change in the socioeconomic structures of our country will relieve the sufferings of the poor and alienated. This concept represents a serious challenge to Catholics who have grown wealthy and powerful in this country, but, I believe, it remains a serious mandate of the gospel. It represents an even greater challenge to Catholic religious educators faced with the task of preparing Catholic students for a world increasingly and seriously divided between the wealthy and the poor.

For teachers who are curious, or might be slightly interested in making their religious education classes more multicultural, the most important step is the first step. Begin somewhere. Thus, I conclude with the words of Jesus, found in one particular translation (Tyndale House Foundation, 1967): "If you have ears, listen! And be sure to put into practice what you hear. The more you do this, the more you will understand what I tell you (Mark 4: 23-24).

CITED LITERATURE

Abbott, W. (Ed.) (1966). *The documents of Vatican II* (J. Gallagher, Trans). New York: American Press.

Bennett, C. (2003). *Comprehensive multicultural education* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Center for Media Literacy (2003). Framework for Social Analysis. Retrieved March 16, 2003 from http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article186.html.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and reading the world.* South Hadley , MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Grant, C.A., & Sleeter, C.E. (1999). *Making choices for multicultural education* (3rd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Groome, T.H. (1991). *Sharing faith.* San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Herrera, M. (1992). Meeting cultures at the well. *Religious Education* 87(2) (spring 1992), 178-179.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Liberatory consequences of literacy: A case of culturally relevant instruction for African American students. *Journal of Negro Education,* 61(3), 378-391.

National Catholic Education Association. Washington, DC.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Protocol for assessing the conformity of catechical materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.* http://www.nccbuscc.org/catechism/document/protocol.htm. (November 3, 2002).

Nieto,S. (Ed.) (1999). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming Diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education.* (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education.* NY: Teachers College Press.

Pang, V. (2001). *Multicultural education: a caring-centered, reflective approach.* Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Ratzinger, J. (1984). *Instruction on certain aspects of "liberation theology".* Boston: Daughters of St. Paul.

Rogers, C. R., Freiberg, H. J. (1994). *Freedom to learn for the 80's* (3rd ed.). NY: Merrill.

Talvacchia, K.T. (1997). A theological framework for multicultural religious education. *Horizons, 24(2) 215-229.*

Tyndale House Foundation (1967). *Reach out: The living new testament.* Wheaton, IL:

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* State University of New York.

Wink, J. (1997). *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the real world.* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Contact Information
Mary Kremer, OP. PhD
Assistant Professor of Education
Dominican University
River Forest, IL 60305
(708) 524-6471
mekremer@email.dom.edu

AERA

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR THE DISENFRANCHISED: FUSING MULTICULTURAL STRATEGIES INTO CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL RELIGION CLASSES

Author(s): KREMER, MARY

Corporate Source: DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY

Publication Date: APRIL 2003

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 1	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2A	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2B
Level 1 ☐	**Level 2A** ☐	**Level 2B** ☐
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: Mary E. Kremer	Printed Name/Position/Title: MARY E. KREMER, O.P.
Organization/Address: 7900 W. Division St. River Forest, IL 60305	Telephone: 708-524-6421 FAX:
	E-Mail Address: marykremer@AOL.COM Date: 4/22/03

Assistant Professor

708-524-6665

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC/CHESS
2805 E. Tenth Street, #120
Bloomington, IN 47408

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2001)